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# A Political Shout from the Rooftops of Latin America

LUCIANA ZORZOLI

No les pasó por boluda ni por puta.

No fue su culpa.

Nadie merece terminar en una bolsa, no se justifica.<sup>1</sup>

(Rodríguez 2015)

## Introduction

The philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler was attacked a few weeks ago at the Congonhas Airport in Brazil, where she was arriving as one of the organizers of the international conference titled “The Ends of Democracy” (November 7-9, 2017 SESC Unidade Pompeia São Paulo, Brazil). Her assailants greeted her with insults: “You’re not welcome in Brazil. You’re the devil! The ‘ideology of gender’ has no place in Brazil, you pedophile!”, were among the phrases hurled at her by the hecklers. Not limited to that initial action, the assault was repeated at a later demonstration, this time at the SESC Pompeia Cultural Center in East São Paulo providing the backdrop for the rally against Butler. Less than hundred protestors equipped with rosaries and crosses voiced their opposition to the philosopher, burning and trampling a doll with her likeness. A counter-demonstration emerged spontaneously at the site, coming to her support and defending basic democratic rights.

Writing from nearby Argentina, this scene of violence in Brazil is a familiar one. For some time now, Argentina has looked on as women’s demonstrations and similar actions by the LGBTTTTIQ<sup>2</sup> community have been confronted by small, but vocal and increasingly widespread counter-demonstrations. In particular, the Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres (National Gathering of Women), held annually at different points throughout the country, has been confronted by groups that are willing to violently defend their peculiar vision of what they deem the correct social order (Masson 2007; Di Marco 2012).

As Butler herself remarked in connection with the attacks (Folha de S. Paulo 2017), and as was reconstructed by Richard Miskolci and Maximiliano Campana (2017) as well as Mario Pecheny, Daniel Jones and Lucia Ariza (2016), we must begin to trace the genealogy of these incidents at their point of origin, that is, at the Vatican and its local representatives. It is there that the ultra-conservative myth was born. They say that the gender perspective (or, the ‘gender ideology’, as they prefer) entails a fiendish desire to destroy “the human being” and the “natural” – heterosexual – order of which that human being would be the standard bearer. They claim that it is because of the destruction of those traditional values that violence against women is on the rise. This, effectively, was the sentiment of Juan Luis Cipriani, the Cardinal of Lima, who recently said: “Statistics tell us that young girls are having abortions, but this is not due to girls being abused, but rather because a woman is often seen standing

provocatively, as if in a store window.” (El Sol 2016) In another recent iteration of this sentiment, Héctor Aguer, Archbishop of La Plata, Argentina, stated that violence against women is on the rise “because women themselves often lack the protection that only marriage can provide” (La Nación 2017). One thing is certain: This conservative and fundamentalist upsurge has its origins not just in religion but in politics as well. It shows in the vitriolic response to today’s struggles, directed against the fight to end the myriad forms of gender violence, against the demand for the right to identity and the struggle for self-determination to lead a life free of oppression. It is a reaction to the movement that was (re-)organized around a political shout from the rooftops of Latin America: *ni una menos* (not one less)!

### The Situation of Women in Latin America

A glance at the situation of women in Latin America reveals an appalling picture. According to available statistics, two of every three women murdered in Central America were killed for simply being women, and up to 53% have suffered sexual or physical violence at the hands of a man in their immediate social circle (Pan American Health Organization 2012; Essayag 2013).

In Argentina alone, 2,384 femicides were recorded between 2008 and 2016, and it is calculated that every 30 hours a woman is murdered as a victim of gender violence (Observatorio de Femicidios en Argentina “Adriana Marisel Zambrano” 2016). Sexual and physical violence is just one element of a complex framework of inequalities in Latin America. The wage gap, the feminization of poverty and precarity, discrimination and asymmetrical relations of power/authority are the backbone of a patriarchal system that reproduces exclusion of and violence against women.

Despite advances at the legislative level, the state and society’s dominant sectors resist implementing the type of comprehensive policies that could address the issue of gender based murder that is in fact growing at an alarming rate. They are also blocking regulations that can guarantee full access to reproductive rights and decriminalize abortion, the latter remaining strictly prohibited throughout the region while the right to abortion is one of the key demands of the *Ni una Menos* movement. Beyond a few laws and programs, the majority of governments, the church, and the concentrated media sphere insist on employing a victim-blaming language to deal with the most resonant cases of femicide (those that have provoked mass demonstrations and spurred a new wave of organization) and denied the importance and deadly consequences of illegal abortions, making it clear that change can only be brought about through dissidence in the streets and through struggle (Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género 2012). It was precisely in recognition of this situation, along with the deterioration of democracies throughout the region, that hundreds of thousands of women South of the Río Bravo began to organize, so that in mid-2015, they could shout in unison: “Down with *machista* violence! *Ni una menos*!”

## ***Ni una menos!* And Its Feminist Signs**

The first demonstration to march under the banner of “*Ni una menos*” appeared as a sudden explosion, a rallying cry that shook all of Argentina on June 3, 2015. The Women’s Strike of March 8, 2016 was the movement’s second milestone, a feat that was repeated with even greater success the following year, and will no doubt be even bigger in 2018.

The marches express a collective reaction in the face of *machismo*’s naturalization, a questioning of the tabloid-like treatment of femicides, and the recognition that behind the wave of gender-related killings is a political and social dimension in need of analysis and combative response. The movement has become the point of entry where women from multiple backgrounds can come together, sharing and organizing in a collective format, defying the mandate that we should bear the burden of violence alone and in silence.

These demonstrations were also a response to growing tensions brought about by transformations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (in the family, in employment, sexuality, identity, etc.). They are the expression of a new wave of feminism on the rise across the region, one that claims basic rights regarding the control over one’s own body, and the right to radically transform our own lives. The movement is ambitious and diverse, making its presence felt inside and beyond the traditional institutions as it spreads its motto across the walls of trade union centers, storefronts, schools, offices and businesses, as the patch on a backpack, on bags and T-shirts of women of all ages.

The movement has issued a challenge to the unequal gender relations that keep women (along with gender dissidents) in a place of social, political and economic subordination. As Dora Barrancos (2017) has suggested, the movement is carrying a powerful message capable of mass-recruitment, with a less ritualistic approach than in previous years and with greater territorial reach.

It is just one more indication that *vivas nos queremos* (we want us, alive). *Ni una menos*.

## **Notes**

- 1 “She wasn’t killed because she was stupid or a slut. It wasn’t her fault. No one deserves to end up in a bag, nothing can justify it.” (Transl. LZ)
- 2 LGBTTTIQ includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Transsexual, Two-Spirited, Inter-sexed, Queer.

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## Die Entlassung politischer Gefangener und relativer Frieden in Äthiopien

SONJA JOHN

### Relativer Frieden

Äthiopien steht weiterhin am Rande zum Bürgerkrieg. In mehreren Regionen gibt es gewalttätige Auseinandersetzungen zwischen ethnischen Gruppen und gegen die patriarchale Politik der Zentralregierung. Der ‚relative Frieden‘ wird durch Proteste